

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House,
Canberra,
The Committee Secretary



Dear Sir,

I am writing to express my concern at the Federal Government's changes to Youth Allowance eligibility criteria and the effect it will have on further disadvantaging young people from country areas.

The main point I wish to make is that the need to work for 2 years (which is what the new changes will inevitably mean) instead of 1 year will put country students who do not have the advantage of being able to live at home 2 full years behind their city counterparts.

I come from the country and have brought up 4 children in the country. The first 2 have finished their university degrees in medicine from the University on W.A. The next daughter will finish her degree in Medicine this year. The next son is taking a year from studying to become independent for Youth Allowance purposes. If this is extended to 2 years he will be a full 2 years behind his peers and with a course as long as medicine and with the desperate need for good Australian doctors to fill country vacancies, it is once again the country areas which will miss out.....in this case twice...through the student's disadvantaged situation and the shortage of doctors situation.

I have spent many years as the chairperson of our local high school council and as a teacher in a country school and I feel qualified to comment on the needs of country students.

There are many students who, when faced with the need to work for 2 years before studying will invariably not proceed on to study in the city. This applies especially to our 'better' students who find themselves with offers of work which do not require qualifications immediately. They then find it much more difficult to study later in life when they are often supporting partners and families.

Why not make country students exempt from these conditions which undoubtedly make sense when applied to a city situation? Why not make the need to live away from home to study the chosen course and course acceptance the requirements for independent status. If our family lived in the city our children would live at home while studying like their city friends and would have no need for 'independent status'.

We want a 'clever country' of educated young people however it is situations like this that only further increase the gap between the country and city in terms of opportunity.

Thankyou,
Yours sincerely
Heather Fergie